

# REFUGEE COUNCIL OF AUSTRALIA

INCORPORATED IN A.C.T. - ABN 87 956 673 083

37-47 ST JOHNS RD, GLEBE, NSW, 2037  
PO BOX 946, GLEBE, NSW, 2037  
TELEPHONE: (02) 9660 5300 • FAX: (02) 9660 5211  
info@refugeecouncil.org.au • www.refugeecouncil.org.au

## MEDIA RELEASE

20th July 2001

ONLY PART OF THE STORY: PM AND RUDDOCK LEAVE OUT RELEVANT FACTS ON REFUGEES

Both the Prime Minister and Minister Ruddock were quick to defend Australia's detention policy in the wake of their fellow politicians' criticisms and to stress the importance of "sending a message that Australia is not a soft touch" but they are telling the Australian public only part of the story. What we are not hearing is that:

- the vast majority of unauthorised arrivals at this time have come to this country to seek protection from persecution they genuinely fear;
- most refugees are not able to travel through conventional channels because they cannot get a passport from the government that is persecuting them;
- over 75% (more in the case of Afghans and Iraqis) of the unauthorised arrivals are being determined to be refugees;
- Australia is obliged under international law to provide protection for refugees;
- Australia is also bound not to punish refugees for arriving in this country without permission.

We are also not being told that:

- every western country is receiving asylum seekers;
  - last year 452,000 asylum seekers sought protection in Europe. Fewer than 12,000 came to Australia;
  - in 2000, nearly 35,000 Iraqi asylum seekers went to Europe; only about 2,000 to Australia;
  - Australia spends over \$120 million per year on detention centres but gives the UN High Commissioner for refugees less than \$14 million for its core work protecting and supporting 21.1 million refugees and people of concern;
  - Australia is the only western country to maintain a policy of mandatory, non-reviewable detention;
  - Australia has slashed the number of places it devotes to the offshore humanitarian program from 15,000 in 1995-96 to 5,700 in 2001-02.
- Nor are we being told that:

- the failure of the international community to provide adequate support to countries of first asylum in the Middle East has a great deal to do with the movement of asylum seekers to the west.

If the Government is serious about stemming the flow, the message it should be sending is that Australia will spend more money on making sure that refugees do not have to risk their lives in search of protection.

Today has been declared by the United Nations as World Refugee Day. There are 21.1 million good reasons why Australia should mark this day with respect and not demonise the victims further.